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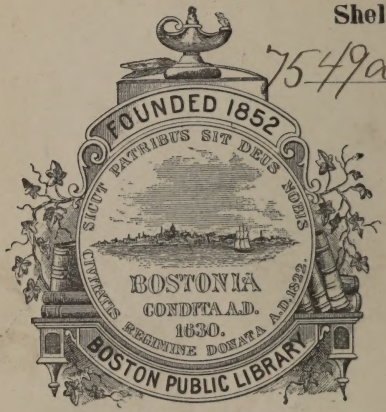


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# SERMON FOR CHILDREN.

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BY REV. E. S. GANNETT.

BOSTON:

LEONARD C. BOWLES.

1831.

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# SERMON,

WRITTEN FOR THE CHILDREN OF HIS SOCIETY,

AND PREACHED MAY 8, 1831.

7549.26

BY EZRA S. GANNETT,

JUNIOR MINISTER OF THE FEDERAL STREET SOCIETY.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BOSTON:
LEONARD C. BOWLES,
1831.

Rev. E. S. Gannett
Oct. 1. 1866
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from 7441.57

# SERMON.

COME, YE CHILDREN, HEARKEN UNTO ME; I WILL TEACH YOU THE FEAR OF THE LORD. PSALM XXXIV. 11.

I shall preach this morning to the children; and I hope they will 'hearken unto me,' as I shall try, while 'teaching them the fear of the Lord,' to use such simple language, that the youngest shall understand me. Those of my hearers who are parents, will not wonder at my choice of this part of the audience, to be the subjects of address. While they who do not bear, and never have borne the parental office, will not regret that the children of the congregation will have had one sermon written purposely for them, who listen to so many, in which, as they cannot understand much either of the thought or the expression, they can feel little or no interest. Besides, we were all once children; and if we have outgrown our childish habits, should still be gui-

ded by the same great principles of truth and duty, which were implanted in our minds in their infancy by pious affection.

I have said, children, that you cannot understand all the sermons which are preached in your hearing. But the reason of this is not, that you cannot understand religion. In what I shall now say, I wish to prove to you that you can, and that you ought to be religious.

First, I will show you that you can be religious. What is religion? It is nothing strange; it is what we were made for. To be religious is to be good and to do right. You know that you have a Father in heaven. Religion is loving and obeying God, our heavenly Father, who is always doing us good, and who loves us so much that he has taught us what we ought to do. You can love and obey God; you can be good and do right. If you love God and do right and are good children, you will be religious; and your religion will be as true religion as your father's or your mother's, or any other person's whom you know or of whom you read.

This word religion, then, means your whole behavior and character. Plain as it is, it means a great deal. You see that it does not belong to one place nor to a particular time. You must be religious on other days as well as on Sundays, and in other houses besides the meeting-house.

Your religion must make you good at home, and at school, and in the street, and in your plays, and when you are alone; and if you are religious, you will be good in all these places and at all these times.

When I say that religion concerns your character, I suppose that you have a character, and this is true. Every one who is old enough to do right or wrong, to be honest or to deceive, to be pleasant or passionate, to be obedient or perverse, has a character: a character which he may change, if it be ever so bad, or which he may make better, if it be ever so good. When you hear of the duty of taking care of one's character, you should think that something is said to you, and that you have a character to take care of.

You often hear too of duty. We are told that we must make duty our guide, that it must be our law, and that we must never violate, or act against, duty. All this language means that we should do right; so that a child's duty is to do what a child ought, just as a man's duty is to do what a man ought.

Perhaps you will ask, how you can always know what is your duty—how can you tell what is right or good? Your own hearts will teach you. You cannot do wrong, without feeling that you have violated your duty. You know that you ought to obey your parents and your teach-

ers, to speak the truth, to be kind, modest and diligent: and when you do the opposite, are idle, use bad words or are rude in manners, indulge ill humor, or say what you do not believe, are disrespectful to your instructers, or disobedient to your parents, you suffer in your hearts; and this inward suffering you know is the consequence of doing wrong, and the proof that you have done wrong,—that you have neglected your duty and injured your character. Before you act too, and before you speak, there is something within you which tells you that it is better to be honest and gentle and docile, than to gratify your self will or your passions; something which makes you believe that innocence and piety are better than wicked thoughts, or words, or actions. This something, which teaches you beforehand what is right, and punishes you when you have done wrong, and gives you a feeling of happiness when you are good, is conscience; and if you always listen to it, you will have no trouble in learning your duty.

Religion, I repeat, because you cannot too early learn nor too often remember it, religion takes in the whole conduct and character. Now our characters are made up of our feelings, our dispositions and our habits, or our usual ways of acting; and conduct is all that we do. You see then what is meant when we say that religion is

a great subject. It has many truths and many duties,—that is, things to be believed, and things to be done,—which the good man learns and practises. Preaching is instruction about these truths and duties. If you will listen to me, I will explain some parts of this instruction, so that you may better understand how you can be religious.

First of all, as I just told you, if we are religious, we believe in God, and love him and obey him. You never saw God: nor did any one of us who are older ever see God, for he is a spirit; but that is no more a reason why we should not believe in God than our never seeing our minds is a reason for believing that we have no minds. They are spirit, and we never saw them nor the mind of any body else, though every body has a mind. This is one of the greatest truths that we can learn, yet you understand and believe it. We know that there is a God, because there must be some one who made and takes care of the world, and of us and our friends. God gives us all our blessings, and is very good to us, and is himself perfectly good. You ought to love him for the same reason that you love your father or mother or any of your friends, because you believe that they are good and that they love you. Only God's goodness is as much more than theirs, as he is greater than they. We call God infinitely great

and good, and we mean by this that we never shall be able to think how great and good he is. God has given us some commands; he has taught us what we should do, and what we must not do. He always sees us, and though he is our Father, we cannot be his dear children, unless we obey him. If he is so great and good, we should be afraid to disobey him, not only because he can make us unhappy for our disobedience, but because we love him too well to do what he has shown us is wrong. This is 'the fear of the Lord,' which I said in the beginning of the sermon that I should teach you. You should think of God as your best friend, and should delight to talk to him in your hearts; and that will be prayer. You pray when you tell God what you want, and ask him to help you and to love you. When you disobey God, or do what you know he does not approve, you commit sin. If you love God and do as he has taught to do, and take pleasure in thinking of him and praying to him, you will be pious children. Piety is loving God with all our heart. Children can be pious as well as older people.

Next, we are taught to have faith in Jesus Christ, and to love and imitate him. Do you not know what faith is? You have faith when you believe what is told you. If you believe what is written in the Bible about Jesus Christ, and be-

lieve that what he said is true, you have faith in Jesus Christ, you have christian faith. You should think of Jesus Christ as that kind friend, who has taught us to know and love God, that we may be good and happy. You should learn how good, how gentle and humble and kind and pious he was, that you may try to be like him. And when you remember that he was willing to die that he might do us good, through his religion which his death and resurrection proved to be a religion from God, you will both love him, and will thank God who sent him to teach and bless our world.

You have often heard that you should be honest, and generous, and mild and patient; and you will be, if you are religious; for religion makes us good in all respects. It makes us do right and feel right towards God, and towards others, and towards ourselves. You should do to others as you would wish them to do to you, and should try to make them good and happy. There are two duties often urged from the pulpit, which you can practise, though you may think that they do not belong to you.

The first of these is self-denial. Perhaps you have never thought that you could practise self-denial; but there is not a day when you may not very often do it. When you give up your own

wishes to oblige another, whether he is older or is one of your play-mates, when you do what seems to you right though you would prefer to do something else, or when you keep yourself calm and pleasant though provoked to say passionate words,—then you practise self-denial. And self-denial is a part of religion.

The other duty is improvement. You should grow wiser and better every day. This is your business. Be learning and doing your duty all the time. You can make improvement almost as well in one place as in another; because you can acquire some knowledge, or you can continue to do well; and this is forming a habit of goodness: and to form good habits is to make improvement. However small you are, do not be willing that a single day should pass without your learning something. And remember, that every day should make you a better child, by making you more obedient and more happy.

There is nothing which I want you more to understand, than that religion will make you happy. Never think of it as a sad or frightful thing. It is the only way in which you can really enjoy yourselves. When you are good and full of love, all will seem bright and pleasant. You will awake in the morning with a cheerful heart, and in the evening when you think how you have spent the day, it will be remembered with pleas-

ure. You will wonder how you are always so happy without trying to be happy. It is because God has made a rule, that if you do right you shall have the feeling of enjoyment. Religion gives many delights, which a person who does not love God and obey him, cannot have; it makes our common pleasures more agreeable; and though it will not prevent our suffering pain, it causes pain to seem a blessing.

I have now described the religion which you may have: but before I mention the reasons for your being religious, I would say a few words to you on some of the means, which you may use for fixing religion in your hearts. Whatever will help to make us better, is called a means of religion.

I have already spoken of prayer, which I wish you to consider a delightful service. Do not say your prayers because you are obliged to repeat the words; but be glad that you, a little child, are allowed to speak to God. Try to pray in your own words. Remember that God knows your desires, and therefore, you need not be afraid to own them to him, if you ought not to be afraid to have them; and he will love you for your disposition to confide in him; and if you ask him to teach you, he will give you wisdom and knowledge, as he gave to Solomon when he

prayed for them, and will make you love and obey him; and this help will be his spirit in your heart.

You have been taught to read the Bible. I hope you have learned to love it. You cannot love it too well nor read it too much, if you will try to understand what you read, and will study it that you may learn what is true and good. Without the Bible I cannot tell you how ignorant we should be, nor how changed every thing about us would be. Our homes, our friends, our characters, our joys, would all be different from what they now are, and we should be little, and perhaps no better than the heathens, of whom some of you have read. Love the Bible then.

Love Sunday too; because you then receive more instruction than on other days about your heavenly Father and your duty. Either at home, or in the Sunday school, or in the church, or in all of them, you are taught to be wise and good. Do not think Sunday a tiresome day, because you cannot have your usual amusements. I wish that it might seem to you the pleasantest and shortest day of the week.

On other days attend school cheerfully, and be diligent. Remember that you have much to learn. At home be obedient and affectionate; among your companions be just and modest. When

you are alone, be as careful not to do wrong as if you were in the sight of your friends.

I will add one single caution;—avoid bad companions, and do not imitate bad examples. I say this to you because you will see bad examples, and because the choice of your companions depends very much on yourselves. There are children who are profane, rude, disrespectful to their parents, and who spend the time, when they are out of their parents' or their teachers' sight, in doing wrong. Do not imitate them nor keep their company. Perhaps they have not such pleasant and religious homes as you have; you should be sorry for them, but not go with them. Do not think that it is manly to use bad words, or to be passionate or unruly, for there is nothing that is a surer mark of a mean and cowardly spirit. Seek good children for your companions, and imitate those who are older than yourselves and whose conduct seems to you right, and always remember that there is one Being above you who looks into your hearts, and who loves sincere and modest goodness.

Observe these rules, and you will be religious; for you will be good children. You will be all the time strengthening right dispositions, forming correct habits, and acquiring a christian character. And then, when you are no longer chil-

dren, you will be virtuous and happy, beloved by others, and useful in the world.

But I promised to give you some reasons for being religious. I shall name but three, either of which is sufficient.

The first is, it is the demand of your nature, that you be religious. God created you for this very end, and made known his design through the capacities and wants of your souls. This is the language which we who are older address to to one another, and you cannot understand it without explanation. But it is as true of the child as of the man. I will explain it to you. Each one of you has a soul, a mind, or spirit, something that is not the body, though now it lives in the body. This soul has powers and wants, that is, it can exert itself and it needs to receive instruction and strength. You feel these capacities and wants, though they are now tender. The older you grow, your consciousness of them, or the feeling that they are within you, will increase. Now religion alone can give your souls what they want. If you do not learn and do your duty as the children of God, you cannot be happy; your minds and hearts will not let you be happy, because they will not be satisfied. If you are bad children, you will suffer for your folly, both in childhood and years afterwards.

The desire of your souls for truth and goodness, which you will feel more and more as you grow older, shows what I meant when I said that it is the demand of your nature that you be religious. Our souls grow like our bodies. You have heard it said, that truth is the food of the mind. If you eat what is not healthful, or if you go without food, you know how much your bodies suffer. So if you give your minds what is not good, or if you neglect them,—if you feed them with error and sin, or let them starve from want of care,—they will suffer, and you will feel the suffering. Religion is the proper nourishment of the soul, and it should have it as soon as it asks for it, which it does as soon as it knows the difference between good and evil.

A second reason for being religious is, that you may make your friends and all about you happy. They have done and they are doing all they can for you. Your mothers bore you in their arms and took most tender care of you, when you were too young even to know a mother's smile. They have watched by you and nursed you in sickness, they have made a thousand sacrifices, they are constantly making sacrifices which it gives them pleasure to make, for you; your fathers have been anxious and industrious for your sakes; you have brothers and sisters who love you dearly, and friends who often think of you. You

owe all these a large debt of love; and you can pay it to them all in one way, and only one way, —by being good. Their desire is, that you should grow up with good dispositions and habits, so that you may be beloved and respected, and may be useful and happy. If you be religious, as I have shown you that you may be, you will fill their hearts with joy; and though you are little children, you will do some good in the world.

The third reason for being religious is, that you are immortal creatures, and you can prepare yourselves for heaven only by loving and having religion while you live here. You are creatures, because God has made you; but he has made every one of you immortal. You have been told this so often, that I am sure you understand me. When you die, you will not cease to live. Whether you shall be young or old when you die, you will continue to live, to think and feel, and to enjoy or to suffer. Some children die in infancy, before they can speak; but they only go to live somewhere else. To die is to go away from the body. When I think of you, I do not think of your bodies so much as of your minds, or souls. These will leave the body, just as the body puts off a garment that it has done wearing, and then your souls, if you have been good and pious, will go to heaven. Heaven is the name we give to

the life of the good after death; so that none but the good can enjoy it.

You see that death, instead of making you afraid or unhappy, should be pleasant to think of. God, and Jesus Christ, and kind friends will be found in heaven, and you will know more and enjoy more there than you ever could know or enjoy on earth. How strong a reason have you to be religious, that when you die you may go to heaven and dwell there forever.

For the sake of your present happiness, for the sake of your parents and other friends, and for the sake of your immortal souls, you should be good or religious, while you are children. I might tell you too, that it is the will of God that you should love and serve him now. I might ask you to think how much God has done for you, and how much justice there is in his requiring you to do right as soon as you have learned to know good from evil. I might show you that if you would be good men and women, you must begin by being good children, or else you will have the trouble of correcting your bad habits and getting better ones. I might say many other things to persuade you to seek and keep religion. But I have preached long enough. I have shown what religion is in children, how you may become religious, and how you may know that you

have christian faith and goodness, and I have given you some reasons why you should be good and pious. And now I can only hope and pray for you, that you may be innocent and virtuous and happy, and that when God shall take you out of this world, he may take you to heaven, where will be purity and happiness forever.